

Message Text

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SUBJECT: ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON LIBYA'S PALESTINIAN COMMUNITY

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THE LIBYAN GOVERNMENT HAS NOT PUBLISHED ANY DEMOGRAPHIC DATA ON CHARACTERISTICS OF ITS LARGE FOREIGN POPULATION. FIGURES NOTED ARE ROUGH ESTIMATES ONLY SUPPORTED BY INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL PALESTINIAN COMMUNITY. ANSWERS ARE KEYED TO QUESTIONS RAISED REFTEL.

A. POPULATION -- THERE IS NO ACCURATE FIGURE ON THE NUMBER OF RESIDENT PALESTINIANS IN LIBYA, BUT THE MOST RELIABLE ESTIMATE SEEMS TO BE AROUND 10-15,000. HOWEVER, THE LEBANESE EMBASSY, WHICH PROVIDES DOCUMENTATION FOR A LARGE NUMBER OF THE PALESTINIANS HERE, CLAIMS THAT THE ACTUAL FIGURE IS TWICE THIS AMOUNT. ALMOST ALL MALES OF WORKING AGE ARE EMPLOYED OR ARE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS. NO ESTIMATE ON THE PERCENTAGE OF FEMALES OF WORKING AGE WHO ARE EMPLOYED, ALTHOUGH IT IS PROBABLY NOT MORE THAN 30 PERCENT. BIRTH RATE IS PROBABLY LOWER THAN LIBYA'S 3.7 PERCENT RATE.

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B. PREVAILING WORKER CHARACTERISTICS -- PALESTINIAN WORKERS IN LIBYA FORM A HIGHLY SKILLED COMMUNITY. WHILE MANY ARE OFFICE CLERKS, OTHERS ARE TEACHERS, ENGINEERS AND DOCTORS. A LARGE NUMBER WORK AS TECHNICIANS FOR THE OIL COMPANIES. FEW ARE COMMON LABORERS. AS SUCH, ANNUAL WAGES ARE GENERALLY ABOVE LIBYA'S PER CAPITA INCOME AND ARE PROBABLY IN THE \$8-12,000 RANGE PER YEAR. ALTHOUGH

AS MANY AS EIGHT PERCENT ARE LONG-TERM RESIDENTS, VERY FEW REGARD LIBYA AS A PERMANENT HOME. PALESTINIANS REGULARLY SAVE A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF THEIR EARNINGS AND ARE NOT AT PRESENT INVESTING NEW CAPITAL IN LIBYA.

C. POST 1973 EMPLOYMENT TRENDS -- THE LIBYAN GOVERNMENT HAS ACTIVELY DISCOURAGED THE EMPLOYMENT OF PALESTINIANS ARRIVING AFTER 1973, ALTHOUGH EXCEPTIONS ARE SOMETIMES MADE FOR TEACHERS, DOCTORS, ENGINEERS AND OTHER HIGHLY SKILLED GROUPS. PALESTINIANS RESIDENT IN LIBYA PRIOR TO 1973 HAVE NOT ENCOUNTERED ANY DIFFICULTY IN OBTAINING OR RETAINING EMPLOYMENT.

D. LEGAL AND SOCIAL RESTRICTIONS -- LIBYA ACTIVELY DISCOURAGES THE SETTLEMENT OF PALESTINIANS. PALESTINIAN CHILDREN BORN HERE ARE NOT ACCORDED CITIZENSHIP, BUT THE LIBYAN GOVERNMENT GIVES THEM REFUGEE TRAVEL DOCUMENTS TO FACILITATE TRIPS ABROAD. LONG TERM PALESTINIAN RESIDENTS GENERALLY CARRY NON-LIBYAN (USUALLY JORDANIAN) PASSPORTS OR REFUGEE DOCUMENTATION. NEVERTHELESS, PALESTINIANS ARE ACCORDED FULL SOCIAL BENEFITS, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE NO LOCAL POLITICAL RIGHTS. PALESTINIANS, ALONG WITH LIBYANS AND OTHER WORKING FOREIGNERS, ARE REQUIRED TO PAY AN ANNUAL JIHAD (HOLY WAR) TAX WHICH AMOUNTS TO FIVE PERCENT OF THEIR SALARIES.

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E. FUTURE GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT POLICIES -- LIBYA WILL HAVE A CONTINUING NEED FOR EXPATRIATE EXPERTS, BUT THE OUTLOOK FOR PALESTINIAN EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IS NOT GOOD. THE MAJOR BARRIER IS POLITICAL, I.E. THE PRESENT REGIME DOES NOT WANT TO ENCOURAGE FURTHER PALESTINIAN MIGRATION FROM ISRAEL, THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OR THE COUNTRIES SURROUNDING THEM.

F. PREVAILING NATIONAL VIEWS -- THERE IS NO LOCAL RESSENTMENT AGAINST THE PRESENCE OF PALESTINIAN CIVILIANS.

G. EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES -- PALESTINIANS ENJOY FULL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN LIBYA. THEY ARE NOT NORMALLY GIVEN OVERSEAS SCHOLARSHIPS BUT ARE ABLE TO STUDY THROUGH THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL IN LIBYA ALMOST FREE-OF-CHARGE.

H. LIBYAN GOVERNMENT PLANS -- USING A VERY STRICT VISA POLICY, LIBYA ACTIVELY DISCOURAGES PALESTINIANS FROM ESTABLISHING A PERMANENT RESIDENCE HERE.

I. INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES -- PRINCIPAL INCENTIVES

ARE THE VERY LUCRATIVE SALARIES AVAILABLE TO TRAINED WORKERS IN LIBYA. PRINCIPAL DISINCENTIVES ARE THE RESTRICTIVE VISA POLICY, THE LACK OF LONG-TERM OPPORTUNITIES FOR NON-LIBYANS IN GENERAL, AND RESTRICTIONS ON THE EXPORTATION OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE.

J.HOUSING -- THERE ARE NO PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS AND FEW SLUMS IN LIBYA. PALESTINIAN HOUSING DOES NOT DIFFER FROM THAT OF THE GENERAL POPULATION. PALESTINIANS, LIKE ALL FOREIGNERS, NORMALLY LIVE SCATTERED AMONGST THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION.

K. OTHER FACTORS -- AS NOTED, LIBYA DOES NOT OFFER ANY DOCUMENTARY OR LOCAL POLITICAL INCENTIVES TO PALESTINIANS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO ADOPT LIBYA AS A PERMANENT HOME. PALESTINIANS, LIKE ALL FOREIGNERS HERE, ENJOY MOST OF THE SOCIAL, HEALTH, AND EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS WHICH THE GOVERNMENT PROVIDES FOR THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION, BUT THE LIBYAN GOVERNMENT TAKES THE VIEW THAT ALL PALESTINIANS MUST EVENTUALLY RETURN TO ISRAEL, GAZA OR THE WEST BANK. EAGLETON

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